

2026 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

For Approval by the Richmond City School Board

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Venue: Richmond City School Board Work Session

Date: December 2, 2025

2026 Legislative Advocacy Priorities

Informed by existing legislative priorities, school division needs, and student and school board feedback, the RPS Legislative Advocacy Priorities address school construction and modernization, K-12 funding reform, and student mental health.

1. School Construction & Modernization
 - Renew the Commission on School Construction and Modernization.
 - Pass 1% sales tax legislation to allow voters to fund modern facilities.
 - Fund per-pupil infrastructure grants to address maintenance needs.

2. Reform Virginia's K-12 Funding Formula
 - Implement JLARC recommendations.
 - Reform the Local Composite Index (LCI).
 - Increase the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT).

3. Strengthen Student Mental Health Supports
 - Increase specialized support staff ratios.
 - Expand community-based partnerships.
 - Support telehealth expansion and Medicaid alignment.

Priority 1 — School Construction & Modernization

Renew the Commission on School Construction and Modernization.

The Commission, created to assess school facility needs and recommend funding solutions, is set to expire in 2026. The General Assembly should reauthorize it to continue its work supporting localities with data, technical assistance, and equitable funding recommendations. Reauthorizing the Commission will ensure Virginia continues to make progress in addressing its \$25+ billion backlog in school infrastructure needs.

Let voters fund modern facilities.

The General Assembly should once again approve legislation allowing localities to hold referenda for a 1% local sales tax dedicated solely to school construction and modernization. This measure, which passed twice with bipartisan support before being vetoed, gives communities a local tool to fund urgently needed school improvements while maintaining voter oversight and accountability.

Fund per-pupil infrastructure grants.

The 2022 school construction package provided a one-time per-pupil allocation for infrastructure improvements across Virginia. This approach helped local divisions like Richmond make critical repairs and upgrades. We ask the General Assembly to reinstate this program with a minimum statewide appropriation of \$500 million, ensuring that every student learns in a safe, modern, and well-equipped school.

Priority 2 — Reform Virginia’s K–12 Funding Formula

Implement JLARC recommendations.

In 2023, JLARC found that Virginia underfunds K–12 education by over \$3 billion annually and recommended transitioning to a student-based funding model. The General Assembly should take the next step in implementing these recommendations to ensure funding reflects student need rather than outdated staffing formulas.

Reform the Local Composite Index (LCI).

Richmond’s LCI continues to overstate the city’s ability to pay for schools, resulting in less state support. JLARC recommended reforms to the LCI, including using a multi-year average of income, property, and sales data to smooth volatility and better reflect fiscal reality. Adopting these changes would direct more equitable funding to localities like Richmond.

Increase the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT).

Virginia’s localities provide services to many state-owned properties that are exempt from local taxes. Increasing the state’s PILOT contributions would help offset the true cost of those services and ease the burden on local taxpayers while supporting critical public education functions.

Priority 3 — Strengthen Student Mental Health Supports

Increase specialized support staff ratios.

Students are facing greater mental health challenges than ever. The General Assembly should increase the Standards of Quality ratio for specialized student support staff—such as school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses—to at least four per 1,000 students. This investment will ensure that every school has the staff needed to address student well-being and reduce barriers to learning.

Support telehealth expansion and Medicaid alignment.

By investing in telehealth infrastructure and improving Medicaid billing processes, the state can help schools connect more students to licensed mental health professionals. This approach is cost-effective, sustainable, and critical for divisions with limited local mental health resources.

Expand community-based partnerships.

Virginia can rapidly expand access to mental health services by creating a Community-Based Partnership Grant Program that funds collaborations between school divisions and local mental health providers. These partnerships will enhance access to care, reduce wait times, and connect students to licensed professionals who can serve them within their schools.

Additional Legislative Priorities

Increase support for economically disadvantaged students.

We support continued reform and greater investment in the state's funding stream that supports economically disadvantaged students, the At-Risk Add-On program.

Increase teacher and staff compensation to the national average.

We support continued investment in teacher and staff compensation to bring Virginia's average teacher salary to at least the national average, with maximum flexibility for local matching funds and timing of disbursement.

Fund Out-of-School Time partners.

We support funding for out-of-school and after school programs, including ones run by the city, by city partners, and by non-governmental organizations.

Increase access to Early Childhood Education.

Richmond supports funding and resources to provide affordable, high-quality full-day, full-year early childhood childcare and education options in all areas of the city, including full funding of the Virginia Preschool Initiative and fully funding the Child Care Subsidy Program, including maintaining current co-payment rates, to ensure affordability for working families.

Upcoming Timeline & Key Advocacy Opportunities

December 2025

- December 1: Legislative drafting deadline
- December 8, 6pm: League of Women Voters Regional Legislative Advocacy Forum - [Register here!](#)
- December 17: Biennial Budget introduced by Governor Youngkin

January 2026

- Advocacy trainings and other opportunities in partnership with the Richmond Education Association - details coming soon!
- January 14: Session begins
- January 16: Budget amendment introduction deadline

February 2026

- February 2: RPS Advocacy Day - details coming soon!
- February 16: Virginia Education Association Advocacy Day - [Register here!](#)
- February 22: House and Senate budgets proposals released

March 2026

- Conference budget adopted
- March 14: Session adjourns

For email updates with advocacy opportunities, form letters, and more information, please sign up for our advocacy email list!

<https://forms.gle/ASE9w5h5R3nPkbxh6>